



**State of Tennessee  
Department of State  
Tennessee State Library and Archives**

**Fite-James Family Papers,  
1814-1879**

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**COLLECTION SUMMARY**

**Inclusive Dates:**

1814-1879, bulk 1863-1865

**Scope & Content:**

This collection of nineteenth-century documents contains papers of the Fite and James families of Middle Tennessee and Kentucky. The records include a land survey, the draft of a speech advocating peace during the Civil War, slave deeds, and family correspondence. The 1875 marriage of Volney James, the son of William James and Agnes Campbell, and Josephine Rowena Fite, the daughter of Judge Samuel McClary Fite and Catherine Wilson, connected the two families.

Samuel McClary Fite was one of seven brothers. Five served in the Civil War. John Fite served in Co. B. 7<sup>th</sup> Tennessee Infantry, CSA. He entered the war as a private and rose through the ranks to full colonel. His brigade fought almost entirely in Northern Virginia. Fite was captured at the Battle of Gettysburg (1864), and spent the remainder of the war among captured officers at Johnson's Island, Ohio. Most of the correspondence in this collection centers on John Fite's time as a prisoner of war. In fourteen letters, of which twelve were written in 1864, Col. Fite described the conditions under which the prisoners lived. (Treatment had become harsher after the War Department learned about Andersonville.) He noted his own health and that of other soldiers at Johnson's Island who were known to his family. On September 8, 1864, he wrote to his sister Kate that prisoners had been restricted to writing one letter on Monday and one on Thursday. They also were no longer able to receive provisions from family and friends on the outside. He encouraged his siblings to write often, noting on October 16, 1864, that "the only source of pleasure we have is the receipt of letters from home and when we fail for any considerable time to get letters from there, we are unhappy." (f. 2)

Other wartime letters written by the Fite family reveal financial hardships and the pressing necessity of giving the oath of loyalty to the United States during Federal occupation. (f. 3) There are two additional letters from Confederate prisoners of war requesting assistance. Cpl. Barnabas (Barney) L. Hennagan, Co. F, 27<sup>th</sup> Mississippi Infantry, CSA (f. 4), had been captured at Chattanooga, Tennessee, on November 24, 1863, and imprisoned at Rock Island, Illinois. He wrote for assistance in August 1864. The second letter, dated March 13, 1865, is from Lt. John Coopwood, Co. G, 35<sup>th</sup> Mississippi Infantry, CSA, to Samuel Fite. Coopwood was imprisoned at Johnson's Island with John Fite (f. 1) and wrote that John had been released two weeks prior.

Two documents illustrate the difficult position of those living in border states like Kentucky. At the time William James wrote on December 6, 1860, he was a 66-year-old school teacher in Madisonville, Kentucky. (f. 6) With his 34-year-old wife, Agnes, he had three children under the age of ten: Volney, Rufus, and Edwin. The draft of a speech by a Kentuckian proposing a peaceful settlement to the war was probably also written by William James. (f. 10)

While the majority of this collection is Civil War era correspondence, there are intriguing items from the years before and after the war. The earliest document is Sam Weakley's 1814 survey of 40 acres along the Cumberland River, land Wilie Barrow sold to Alexander Ewing. (f. 8) The deed mentions the "Town of Waynsborough" but does not state the county. The land was bordered by that of John Criddle and Isaac Lynsey.

The collection includes seven bills of sale for slaves that William James bought between 1840 and 1859. (f. 9) These include the purchase of four children: George in 1840, Eunice in 1848, Darcy in 1850, and Margaret in 1859, and three men: Eli, Sam, and Ned in 1858. James purchased 8-year-old Margaret and a gray mare, Ruby, for \$1,186.25.

The 1875 letter from Volney James to Miss Josie (Josephine) Fite provides insight into the courtship and marriage that connected the James and Fite families. (f. 5) Volney lived in Nashville and cherished his rare visits to Josie in Carthage. His letter refers to a cholera outbreak that had not affected Nashville at that point, though there was "much sickness." The letter ends with a postscript about the first visit in six years from his brother, Rufus, who had "sowed his wild oats and paid dearly for it." Volney writes that Rufus was in "wretchedly bad health" and had undergone suffering and hardship in the previous few years, words that foreshadowed Rufus's untimely death.

Four years later, Rufus James died as a result of injuries sustained in a gunfight in Coahuila, Mexico, where he had gone to work in the silver mines. Flooding in the mines had left him without work and in debt. Prior to leaving his family in 1876, Rufus gave his power of attorney to Volney. On February 8, 1879, Rufus dictated a letter to his brother, explaining that he "met with the misfortune of having been

shot.” He asked for \$150 to help pay his debts and for his medical care and living expenses. Additional correspondence and receipts from Alexander Warfield provide more detail about the gunfight, the medical care provided to Rufus, and his subsequent death on February 19, 1879. (f. 7)

Note: The Tennessee State Library and Archives has a copy of “Memories of Col. John A. Fite, 7<sup>th</sup> Tenn. Inf. C.S.A., Feb. 10, 1832-Aug. 23, 1925” in the Civil War Collection: Confederate and Federal, Box 13, Folder 3.

**Physical Description/Extent:**

1 microfilm reel; 16mm

**Accession/Record Group Number:**

Mf. 2019

**Language:**

English

**Permanent Location:**

Available on microfilm only

**Repository:**

Tennessee State Library and Archives, 403 Seventh Avenue North, Nashville, Tennessee, 37243-0312

## **Administrative/Biographical History**

Members of the Fite family resided in DeKalb, Smith, and Davidson counties in the mid-1800s. The majority of the Fite family documents in this collection are related to Judge Samuel McClary Fite (1816-1875) and Col. John A. Fite (1832-1925). Both men attended law school at Cumberland University in Lebanon, Tennessee. John Fite later settled in Carthage, Tennessee. The 1870 federal census lists John A. Fite as a lawyer, married to Mary Micheaux Fite. He later became the president of the First National Bank of Carthage. John Fite died of liver cancer at the age of 93 in 1925, and U.S. Representative (later Secretary of State) Cordell Hull was among his pallbearers. Samuel Fite was elected as a judge for the Sixth Judicial District, served as a state senator before the war, and was elected to fill a vacancy as a representative to the United State Congress in 1875. He died before being sworn in.

The marriage of Volney James and Josephine Rowena Fite on October 4, 1875, connected the two families. William James was a school teacher and “sometime politician” from Madisonville, Kentucky. His son, Volney, became the manager, and later vice president, of a collection agency in Nashville, Tennessee.

## **Organization/Arrangement of Materials**

This collection is arranged alphabetically by type of document.

## **Conditions of Access and Use**

### **Restrictions on Access:**

None

### **Restrictions on Use and Reproduction:**

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## **Index Terms**

### **Personal Names:**

Fite, John A. (John Armenus), 1832-1925  
Fite, Samuel McClary, 1816-1875  
James, Rufus, 1854-1879  
James, Volney, 1851-1932

### **Corporate Names/Organizations/Government Bodies:**

Camp Douglas (Ill.)  
Confederate States of America. Army. Mississippi Infantry Regiment, 27<sup>th</sup>  
Confederate States of America. Army. Mississippi Infantry Regiment, 35<sup>th</sup>  
Confederate States of America. Army. Tennessee Infantry Regiment, 7<sup>th</sup>  
Confederate States of America. Army. Tennessee Cavalry Regiment, 15<sup>th</sup>  
Johnson Island Prison

### **Subjects:**

Slavery -- History -- Tennessee -- 19<sup>th</sup> century -- Sources

### **Geographic Names:**

Carthage (Tenn.) -- History -- Sources  
Coahuila (Mexico: State) -- History -- Sources  
Johnson Island (Ohio) -- History -- Sources  
Madisonville (Ky.) -- History -- Sources  
Nashville (Tenn.) - History -- Sources  
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Personal narratives,  
Confederate

United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Sources  
United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Prisoners and prisons

**Document Types:**

Correspondence  
Bills of sale  
Land surveys  
Powers of attorney  
Receipts (financial records)  
Speeches

**Acquisition and Appraisal**

**Provenance and Acquisition:**

The papers were loaned for microfilming on February 8, 2012 as part of the *Looking Back: The Civil War in Tennessee* digitization project in Nashville, Tennessee.

**Processing and Administrative Information**

**Preferred Citation:**

Fite-James Family Papers, 1814-1879, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

**Processing Information:**

Processing completed by Genny Carter, September 2012

**Existence and Location of Originals:**

Privately owned

**Electronic Location and Access:**

<http://www.tn.gov/tsla/history/manuscripts/findingaids/2019.pdf>

## DETAILED COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

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### CONTAINER LIST

Contents/Item Title	Date	Box	Folder
Correspondence -- John Coopwood	1864	1	1
Correspondence -- John A. Fite	1863-1865	1	2
Correspondence -- Fite family	1864-1865	1	3
Correspondence -- B. L. Hennagan	1864	1	4
Correspondence -- Volney James	1875	1	5
Correspondence -- William James	1860	1	6
Documents -- Rufus James	1876-1879	1	7
Land survey -- Sam Weakley	1814	1	8
Slave bills of sale -- James family	1840-1859	1	9
Speech -- William James?	ca. 1862-1863	1	10